United Nations

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Supplement No. 35 (A/52/35)

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

5 November 1997

Mr. Secretary-General,

I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 5 of its resolution 51/23 of 4 December 1996.

The report covers the period from 15 November 1996 to 5 November 1997.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Ibra Deguène KA
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

His Excellency
Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, in which the Assembly requested the Committee to consider and recommend to it a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974. During the reporting period, the Committee continued to be composed of 23 Member States, as follows: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.[1]

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[2] were endorsed by the Assembly in resolution 31/20 of 24 November 1976 as a basis for the solution to the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports[3] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination.

3. The Committee has welcomed the signing in September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (A/48/486-S/26560, annex), and subsequent implementation agreements, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, signed in Washington, D.C., which provided for phased withdrawal of Israeli forces and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, as important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

4. In the course of the year, the Committee followed closely the developments in the region. It noted that some progress had been made early in the year on the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron and the Note for the Record setting out a mutual understanding by the parties in implementation of the Protocol. The Committee welcomed the release of the Palestinian women prisoners.

5. The Committee was, however, increasingly concerned at the ongoing deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension on the ground. The Committee expressed its great concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks owing to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In particular, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem, especially the establishment of a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim, the growing threat to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, the continued expansion of settlements in general, the confiscation of Arab land, the demolition of Palestinian houses and the prolonged closure of the Palestinian territory (see chap. IV below).

6. As the organ of the General Assembly dealing with the question of Palestine, the Committee continued to make all efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question in accordance with international legitimacy, and participated actively in meetings of the Security Council, the General Assembly and other international forums convened for this purpose.

II. MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE

7. The mandate of the Committee for the year 1997 is contained in paragraphs 2 to 7 of General Assembly resolution 51/23 of 4 December 1996, in which, inter alia, the Assembly:

(a) Considered that the Committee could continue to make a valuable and positive contribution to international efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period, endorsed the recommendations of the Committee and requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate;

(b) Authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-second session and thereafter;

(c) Requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation to non-governmental organizations in their contribution towards heightening international awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine.

8. In its resolution 51/24 of 4 December 1996, the General Assembly considered that the Division for Palestinian Rights continued to make a useful and constructive contribution through the organization of seminars and meetings of non-governmental organizations, as well as through, inter alia, its research and monitoring activities, and the collection and dissemination of information in printed and electronic form on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources, including for the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine.

9. In its resolution 51/25 of 4 December 1996, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information, the General Assembly noted that several defined provisions of that programme were yet to be implemented, and stressed the importance of implementation of all provisions of the programme.

10. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 51/26 of 4 December 1996, in which the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, in all its aspects, and expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process, which began in Madrid and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements[4] of 1993, as well as the subsequent implementation agreements, including the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 1995, and expressed the hope that the process would lead to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Election of officers

11. At its 227th meeting, on 19 February 1997, the Committee re-elected Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman, and re-elected Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) as Vice-Chairmen.

12. At its 228th meeting, on 14 April 1997, the Committee elected Mr. George Saliba (Malta) as Rapporteur.

B. Re-establishment of the Working Group

13. At its 227th meeting, on 19 February 1997, the Committee re-established its Working Group in order to assist in the preparation and expedition of the work of the Committee, on the understanding that any Committee member or observer could participate in its deliberations.[5] The Working Group was constituted under the chairmanship of Mr. George Saliba (Malta) and Mr. Syed Akbaruddin (India) as Vice-Chairman.[6] At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for 1997.[7]

IV. REVIEW OF THE SITUATION RELATING TO THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

14. In accordance with its mandate, the Committee continued to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to exert all efforts to promote the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

15. The Committee also continued to monitor the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the developments in the peace process on an ongoing basis through the media and the reports of United Nations entities, as well as through the information provided by non-governmental organizations, individual experts and participants in meetings held under the auspices of the Committee.

16. The Committee followed closely the developments in the Middle East peace process. The Committee welcomed the signing by the parties on 15 January 1997 of the Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron and the Note for the Record outlining mutual undertakings by the two sides in implementation of the Protocol. The document set a timetable for the further redeployment of the Israeli troops. Over 80 per cent of the city was successfully transferred to the Palestinian Authority. In a statement issued on 20 January 1997,[8] the Bureau of the Committee said it was encouraged by the signing of the Protocol. It expressed the hope that the Protocol would lead to the full implementation of the agreements already reached between the parties, in particular the commencement of substantive negotiations on matters pertaining to the permanent settlement. The Bureau reaffirmed its full support for the peace process and the realization by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, primarily the right to self-determination and statehood.

17. The Committee also welcomed the establishment, at the beginning of February, of eight bilateral Israeli-Palestinian subcommittees to tackle the outstanding issues during the transitional period, including the operation of the Gaza seaport and airport, safe passage corridors from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

18. The Committee welcomed the increasing contribution to the Middle East peace process by the various international parties. In that regard, it noted the increased involvement of the co-sponsors of the peace process, as well as the European Union, in efforts to bring about the resumption of the bilateral negotiations. The Committee was also appreciative of the resilient efforts with which a number of world leaders contributed to the task of restarting the peace process.

19. The Committee noted with extreme concern, however, that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks during the year as a direct result of the position taken by the Government of Israel on the various elements of the peace process. This year again, the Committee observed the disturbing lack of respect by the Israeli side for the agreements already signed with the Palestinian counterparts. In the course of the year, numerous statements and actions on the ground by the Government of Israel created a situation in which the peace process could not successfully move forward. Throughout the year, the Israeli Prime Minister, members of the Government and other high-level officials made statements that negatively affected the sensitive issues to be discussed by the parties in the course of the permanent status negotiations. Especially worrisome were continued Israeli statements of intent with regard to the expansion of the existing Jewish settlements, the construction of new ones, and

the building of roads to connect those settlements. The Committee considered those declarations not conducive to creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence between the parties and generally harmful to the peace process.

20. The Committee deplored the decision by the Government of Israel on 26 February 1997 to approve the construction of a new Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem. In spite of the overwhelming expression of opposition to this decision by the international community (see paras. 34-55 below), construction of the settlement began on 18 March. On the same day, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement[9] deploring the beginning of the construction and voiced its concern at the negative implication of this decision for the future of the peace process. The Bureau also called for an end to the policies of military occupation, land confiscation and settlement, and for the resumption of the bilateral negotiations. In September, the Committee also expressed grave concern at efforts by militant settlers to establish a permanent presence in the Ras al-Amud district in occupied East Jerusalem.

21. In the year under review, the issue of Jewish settlements remained at the forefront of the Committee's attention. The Committee noted that the situation with respect to the construction and expansion of the settlements remained a serious concern. Statements made by representatives of the various branches of the Israeli Government and in the Knesset, indicated that a vigorous effort was under way to maintain and strengthen the Jewish settlers' presence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. In the month of March alone, in addition to the start of construction at Jabal Abu Ghneim, several steps were taken by Israel to that end. The Ministry of Industry and Trade approved a US$ 30 million programme to encourage investment in a number of settlements, including four in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. The Ministry of Defence approved the plan for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem. The Knesset Finance Committee approved a special allocation of US$ 16 million for the reinforcement of settlement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In April, a new policy of benefits to settlers, approved in late 1996, was finalized. Purchasers of apartments in 110 settlements throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would receive additional mortgages and grant payments. Also in April, the Ministry of Construction and Housing launched a new advertisement campaign in Israeli newspapers offering government subsidies of up to tens of thousands of dollars to buyers of apartments in West Bank settlements. In May, Israel's Treasury announced the transfer of US$ 16.5 million into further development of Jewish settlements, as part of the Government's decision to grant favoured development status to those areas. The Ministry of National Infrastructures proposed that large tracts of Palestinian land in the West Bank containing water sources be annexed. Also, the construction of a new road network began in the West Bank to allow Jewish settlers to bypass Palestinian self-rule areas.

22. Demolition of Palestinian houses in the various parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip continued during the year. From January to early September, some 100 Palestinian houses were demolished in the occupied territory. The demolitions were carried out by the Israeli army, as well as by Jewish settlers. The Committee noted reports that the Jewish settler population has continued to grow. This led to numerous confrontations between armed settlers and Palestinians and resulted in casualties, including fatalities on the Palestinian side.

23. The Committee noted that, in February, 30 Palestinian women prisoners had been released by the Israeli authorities. The Committee emphasized that the release of the prisoners should have become an important confidence-building

step between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Israel, however, continues to hold more than 3,600 Palestinian prisoners. Instances of the use of excessive force were recorded by the Palestinian Authority and various human rights organizations monitoring the situation on the ground. The Committee reaffirmed that the holding of prisoners in the territory of the occupying Power was a violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention),[10] and called upon the Government of Israel to respect its obligations under the Convention. It also called upon Israel to release the prisoners, pursuant to the bilateral agreements.

24. The Committee followed with much concern the situation with regard to the issue of Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem. It noted reports by Israeli and international human rights organizations of the illegal confiscation by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior of Jerusalem identification documents from Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. Apart from denying residency rights to the Palestinian residents of the city, this policy hampers their access to social services. The Committee is also of the view that the policy is aimed at creating a demographic reality in the city, which would pre-empt any just solution to the question of Jerusalem and would create an eventual imbalance in favour of the Israeli side in the course of the permanent status negotiations on the issue.

25. The Palestinian economy in the past year faced many of the same problems as in the previous years. The wide-scale international assistance effort notwithstanding, the economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained a matter of great concern to the Committee. The Palestinian economy continued to suffer from high unemployment, especially in the rural areas and amongst the young Palestinians.

26. During the past year, Israel continued arbitrarily to impose closures in response to its alleged security needs. According to a report prepared by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, the Palestinian economy lost US$ 6 billion from 1992 to 1996, mostly owing to Israeli closures of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which prevented Palestinian workers from reaching jobs in Israel. The result of the closures has been a 36 per cent drop in per capita gross national product from US$ 2,700 in 1992 to US$ 1,700 in 1996.

27. According to a report of the World Bank issued in August, losses caused by the closure could amount to 40 to 60 per cent of income and output, or US$ 4 million to US$ 6 million a day. Some 51,000 Palestinians had been licensed to work in Israel each day until 30 July 1997. The closure resulted in a US$ 31.1 million loss in potential income, while restrictions on trade between Israel and the Palestinian territories cost another US$ 29.9 million.

28. The Committee expressed grave concern at the imposition by the Israeli authorities of a blockade of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip following the suicide bombing incident in West Jerusalem, on 30 July 1997. The Bureau of the Committee unreservedly condemned all acts of violence against defenceless civilians. The Bureau, in a statement issued on 6 August 1997,[11] also stated that harsh retaliatory measures on the part of the Israeli Government would dangerously exacerbate the state of the Palestinian economy and result in greater hardship and despair among the Palestinian population. A closure was reimposed by the Israeli authorities following another suicide incident in West Jerusalem on 4 September 1997. The Committee affirmed on a number of occasions its strong opposition to this policy, which suffocates the fledgling Palestinian

economy, interferes with the implementation of assistance projects and the disbursement of international aid, brings hardship and suffering to Palestinian households and exacerbates tension in the region. The Committee also reiterated its position that the practice of closures was in direct contravention to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

29. In the period under review, the Committee expressed great appreciation for the continued efforts of the international community to provide the needed assistance to the Palestinian people through the Palestinian Authority, despite the growing difficulties on the ground. The Committee was of the view that the international assistance provided by the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as that provided by the donor community, remained vital to the successful transition of the Palestinian people to national sovereignty and statehood. It welcomed the appointment in February of Mr. Chinmaya R. Gharekhan as the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as a focal point for the United Nations family of organizations and to maintain ongoing contact with the donor community, non-governmental organizations active in the field and others.

30. The Committee noted the dedicated effort of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which continued to provide its much-needed services to the refugees and their families despite its difficult financial situation. The Committee noted with appreciation the provision by UNRWA of education, health and social services to some 3.4 million Palestinians and considered it a valuable contribution to the alleviation of poverty and the development of the human, social and economic potential of the Palestinian people. The Agency's programme of special hardship assistance, along with the social welfare programme of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Social Affairs, constituted an important safety net for the Palestinian poor. The two programmes supported some 303,000 Palestinians. The Committee called for continued and intensified international support for the activities of UNRWA.

V. ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/23

1. Reaction to developments affecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people

(a) Communication to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

31. In letters dated 28 February 1997 addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council (A/51/812-S/1997/172), the Acting Chairman of the Committee expressed deep concern and strongly deplored Israel's decision to build a new Jewish settlement in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area, south of East Jerusalem.

32. The Committee reaffirmed that, in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980) of 1 March 1980, and other resolutions, all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof, had no legal validity and must be rescinded.

33. The Committee considered that the growing expansion and consolidation of settlements created facts on the ground inconsistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 and 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973, which the current peace process seeks to implement. This situation seriously undermined the agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and jeopardized the much-needed process of confidence-building between the parties.

(b) Action taken in the Security Council and the General Assembly

(i) Security Council meeting, 5 March 1997

34. At the request of Egypt, the Council met on 5 March 1997 to consider the situation in the occupied Arab territories, in particular the 26 February decision of the Israeli Government to begin construction of new Jewish housing in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area south of occupied East Jerusalem.

35. Requests for a meeting of the Council were also made by the Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (see A/51/812-S/1997/172); the Permanent Observer of Palestine, both in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of February and on behalf of the members of the League of Arab States (see S/1997/165); and the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Group of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (see A/51/817-S/1997/182).

36. The Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate on this issue in the Council on 5 March 1997.[12] He stated that the Committee deplored that decision as a violation of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and many relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The decision was particularly untimely in that the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization had recently reached agreement on redeployment in Hebron, which had given new impetus to the peace process.

37. The Chairman declared that the decision of the Israeli Government ran counter to the letter and the spirit of the Declaration of Principles on the Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent implementation of agreements, particularly the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, signed in September 1995.

38. Moreover, the decision, along with the closing of Palestinian offices in East Jerusalem, had come at a time when the Israeli army continued to seal off Palestinian territories and was delaying its withdrawal from sectors of the West Bank, thereby jeopardizing the continuation of the peace process. As these measures were taken just before the new stage of negotiations on Jerusalem, they seemed to take on the character of a fait accompli. The decision undermined the credibility of the entire peace process and created undesirable tensions in the region at a crucial stage of the negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories.

39. In concluding his statement, the Chairman said that by convening the meeting, the members of the Security Council had shown that the decision taken by the Israeli Government was a source of major concern for the international community as a whole. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People therefore expressed the hope that, at the end of the debate, the Council would demonstrate to world public opinion its unshakable will to annul the Israeli decision to build housing for Jewish settlers in Jabal Abu Ghneim and to put an end to the policy of the Judaization of the Holy City of Jerusalem, a symbol of peaceful coexistence of peoples and religions.

40. At the end of the debate, the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution sponsored by France, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.[13] The vote was 14 in favour to 1 against (United States of America), with no abstentions. The draft resolution was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council.

41. The draft resolution would have called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which altered the facts on the ground, pre-empting the final status negotiations, and had negative implications for the Middle East peace process, and to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War of 12 August 1949, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. It also would have called upon all parties to continue, in the interests of peace and security, their negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached.

42. In response to the negative vote by the United States of America, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations stated that he would bring the issue before the General Assembly.

(ii) Resumed session of the General Assembly

43. At the request of the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of March (see A/51/822), and the Permanent Representative of Colombia in his capacity as Chairman of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/51/823), an urgent meeting of the General Assembly was held on 12 March 1997.

44. At the end of the debate, the Assembly, by 130 votes in favour to 2 against, with 2 abstentions, adopted resolution 51/223 of 13 March 1997. In the resolution, the Assembly, inter alia, called upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which altered the facts on the ground, pre-empting the final status negotiations, and had negative implications for the Middle East peace process; called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, which was applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967; and called upon all parties to continue, in the interests of peace and security, their negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached.

(iii) Security Council meeting, held on 21 March 1997

45. At the request of the Permanent Representative of Qatar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of March 1997, and on behalf of the members of the League of Arab States,[14] the Security Council met on 21 March 1997.

46. A draft resolution submitted by Egypt and Qatar[15] received 13 votes in favour to 1 against (United States of America), with 1 abstention, and was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council.

47. The draft resolution would have demanded Israel's immediate cessation of construction of the Jabal Abu Ghneim settlement south of occupied East Jerusalem, as well as all other Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories.

(iv) Tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

48. The tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was convened on 24 and 25 April 1997 to consider the item entitled "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". The session was convened at the request of the Permanent Representative of Qatar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of April 1997, and with the concurrence of a large majority of Member States, in accordance with the provisions of Assembly resolution 377 A (V) of 3 November 1950, entitled "Uniting for Peace". On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, its Chairman supported the convening of the emergency special session (see A/51/876).

49. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate (see A/ES-10/PV.1) and stated that, while condemning any resort to violence, in particular against civilians, the Committee wished to recall that the peace process had made progress because both parties accepted the principle of land for peace and of a negotiated solution, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

50. On 25 April 1997, the General Assembly, by a recorded vote of 134 votes in favour to 3 against, with 11 abstentions, adopted resolution ES-10/2.

51. In the resolution, the General Assembly, inter alia, condemned the construction by Israel, the occupying Power, of a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim to the south of occupied East Jerusalem; reaffirmed that all legislative

and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that had altered or purported to alter the character, legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem were null and void and had no validity whatsoever; demanded immediate and full cessation of the construction in Jabal Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem; called for the cessation of all forms of assistance and support for illegal Israeli activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in particular settlement activities; requested the Secretary-General to monitor the situation and to submit a report on the implementation of the present resolution, within two months of its adoption; and decided to adjourn its tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the General Assembly to resume its meetings upon request from Member States.

(v) Resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

52. After the submission by the Secretary-General of the report requested under General Assembly resolution ES-10/2, the tenth emergency session was resumed on 15 July 1997 at the request of the Permanent Representative of Egypt, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of July 1997. The Acting Chairman of the Committee, in a letter dated 9 July 1997 addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/ES-10/10), supported the resumption of the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly.

53. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement (see A/ES-10/PV.4).

54. At the end of the debate on 15 July 1997, the General Assembly, by a recorded vote of 131 votes in favour to 3 against, with 14 abstentions, adopted resolution ES-10/3.

55. In the resolution, the Assembly, inter alia, reiterated its demand for the immediate and full cessation of the construction of a new settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim, and demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease and reverse all actions taken illegally, in contravention of international law, against Palestinian Jerusalemites. It demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, make available to Member States the necessary information about goods produced or manufactured in the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and to ensure its respect, in accordance with common article 1, and requested the Secretary-General to present a report on the matter within three months. It decided to adjourn its tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the most recent General Assembly to resume its meetings upon request from Member States.

(c) Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories

56. On 9 June 1997, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened a special meeting to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories.

57. The Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and a Vice-President of the General Assembly took part in the special meeting and made statements. Statements by the President of the Palestinian Authority, the Chairmen of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Organization of African Unity, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the North American Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine were also read out in the meeting by their representatives.

58. A statement was adopted by the Committee on the occasion.[16] The Committee expressed its belief that the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory called for a reaffirmation of the commitments of the international community to the objective of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions.

2. Attendance at international conferences and meetings

59. The Committee, through its Chairman, continued to participate in relevant meetings of intergovernmental bodies, as considered necessary. During the period since its previous report to the General Assembly, the Committee was represented by its Chairman at the sixty-fifth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, held at Tripoli from 24 to 28 February 1997; the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi on 7 and 8 April 1997; the sixty-sixth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers and the thirty-third session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), held at Harare from 28 to 30 May 1997 and from 2 to 4 June 1997, respectively.

60. The Chairman of the Committee reported on his participation in the above-mentioned events at the 229th and 231st meetings of the Committee.[17] In his statements, he reviewed recent events in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem and other occupied Arab territories, in particular the continued Israeli statements of intent to expand existing settlements and construct new ones. In that regard, the Chairman in particular deplored the decision of the Government of Israel to construct a new Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim.

61. He stated that the Ministers at the Non-Aligned Conference had issued a special declaration, in which they had called upon member States to reconsider the steps that they had taken to normalize relations within Israel in the framework of the peace process, so as to ensure its compliance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the land-for-peace principle and full implementation of Israel's agreements, undertakings and commitments on all tracks of the peace talks.

62. At the OAU session, matters relating to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory had been taken up directly in plenary meeting. That meeting had focused, in particular, on Israel's settlement plans in East Jerusalem. The Organization had expressed its grave concern at such violations by Israel of the peace agreements and had called upon the international community to provide the necessary assistance to the Palestinian Authority during the current critical juncture of the peace process.

63. The Heads of State and Government of OAU had adopted two important resolutions, one on the question of Palestine and one on the situation in the Middle East.

64. In its resolution on the question of Palestine, it had reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on its national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

3. Action taken by the United Nations bodies, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and intergovernmental organizations

65. The Committee continued to follow with great interest the activities relating to the question of Palestine of United Nations bodies, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and intergovernmental organizations. The Committee noted, in particular, the continued strong support of the international community for the continuation of the peace process on the basis of the agreements already reached between the parties. The Committee took particular note of the following:

(a) Excerpts from the final communiqué adopted by the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council at its seventeenth session, held at Doha from 7 to 9 December 1996 (A/51/717-S/1996/1030);

(b) Excerpts from the final communiqué of the fourteenth meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Damascus Declaration States, held at Cairo on 28 and 29 December 1996 (see A/51/768-S/1997/4);

(c) Statement issued on 27 February 1997 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the decision of the Government of Israel to approve construction plans for Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghneim (A/52/86-S/1997/181, annex);

(d) Statement concerning the expansion of Israeli settlement on occupied Arab land (Jerusalem), issued by the Council of the League of Arab States at its resumed extraordinary session on 1 March 1997 (A/51/816-S/1997/175, annex);

(e) Special declaration on the cause of Palestine, Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Arab-Israeli conflict, adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit, held at Islamabad on 23 March 1997 (see A/51/915-S/1997/433);

(f) Resolutions adopted by the Commission on Human Rights on 26 March 1997, as follows: resolution 1997/1, on the question of the violation of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine; resolution 1997/2, on human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan; resolution 1997/3, on Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories; resolution 1997/4, on the situation in the occupied Palestine; and resolution 1997/6, on the Middle East peace process;[18]

(g) Resolutions on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, adopted by the League of Arab States at its 107th regular session held on 31 March 1997 (A/51/858-S/1997/281, A/51/859-S/1997/282, A/51/860-S/1997/280, A/51/881-S/1997/327 and A/51/883-S/1997/330);

(h) Excerpts from the final document adopted by the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi on 7 and 8 April 1997 (A/51/912-S/1997/406, annex);

(i) Resolutions on the question of Palestine and on the situation in the Middle East, adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity at its meeting held at Harare from 28 to 30 May 1997;

(j) Economic and Social Council resolutions 1997/16 of 21 July 1997, on Palestinian women, and 1997/67 of 25 July 1997, on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan;

(k) Statement on the aggressive and abusive decision taken by the Israeli Government against the Palestinian people, adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at its extraordinary meeting, held at Cairo on 5 August 1997;[19]

(l) Statements on Israeli settlements and the closure of the Palestinian territory, adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at its meeting held at Geneva, from 18 to 22 August 1997;[20]

(m) Statement on Israeli actions in the occupied territories, issued by the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on 27 August 1997.[21]

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 51/23 and 51/24

66. In carrying out its mandated programme of work, the Committee continued to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the effective implementation of the agreements reached between the parties, and to mobilize international support and assistance to the Palestinian people.

67. In accordance with the authorization given to it by the General Assembly in resolution 51/23, the Committee continued to adjust its programme of work in order to make it more relevant and useful in light of developments on the ground, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints facing the Organization.

68. In particular, the Committee considered that its programme of seminars and meetings of non-governmental organizations continued to be a useful mechanism for in-depth consideration of priority issues and decided to continue that programme, with a sharpened focus and an increased action orientation.

69. The Committee also decided to continue the other aspects of its programme of work, including the programme of studies and publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights; the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority, launched in 1996; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as described below.

70. The Committee, through its Bureau, made efforts to involve additional Member States in its programme of work. In particular, the Bureau held a useful exchange of views with representatives of Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of the European Union, and other representatives of the European Community, on cooperation between the two sides. It was agreed to maintain the contact in the future.

71. The Bureau of the Committee also held consultations with representatives of the secretariats of the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference with a view to organizing jointly an event in early 1998.

72. The Bureau of the Committee agreed with the possibility of making a contribution, from savings achieved in carrying out its programme of work, towards the implementation of the Secretary-General's mandate for the modernization of the land records of Palestine refugees in the custody of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. The Bureau requested the Division for Palestinian Rights to study the various aspects, including the financial aspects, of the electronic conversion of the records.

73. The Bureau also held useful and constructive meetings with the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information regarding key elements of the implementation of its programme of work.

1. Seminars and meetings of non-governmental organizations

74. In accordance with decisions taken in 1996 with regard to streamlining its programme of meetings, the Committee decided to hold the following meetings in the course of 1997: the annual meeting of consultations with representatives of coordinating committees of non-governmental organizations; an Asian seminar and a symposium of non-governmental organizations; a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people; the annual North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations; and the annual International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations, combined with the European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations. The Committee also decided not to hold the remaining meetings programmed for the biennium 1996-1997, and requested the Secretariat to ensure that the resulting savings, to the extent necessary, be used to finance new activities and the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine.

(a) Consultations between non-governmental organizations and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

75. The meeting of consultations with representatives of the International Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, the North American Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, and the European Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine was held at United Nations Headquarters on 3 and 4 February 1997. The Bureau of the Committee informed the representatives of non-governmental organizations of recent developments, the position of the Committee and its programme of work for 1997. The representatives of non-governmental organizations informed the Committee of the activities carried out by the coordinating committees and of the non-governmental organization constituency at large. Various aspects of future cooperation between the Committee and the coordinating committees and the non-governmental organization constituency were considered at the meeting.

(b) Asian Seminar and Non-Governmental Organization Symposium on the Question of Palestine

76. An Asian seminar and a symposium of non-governmental organizations, on the theme "Achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the question of Palestine - the role of Asia" were held at Jakarta from 4 to 7 May 1997. The Committee expressed its deep appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for providing the venue and for the excellent cooperation afforded the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in the preparation and conduct of that event. The Committee was particularly honoured by the presence of H.E. Mr. Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, at the opening ceremony.

77. In panel discussions, the participants in the Seminar dealt with issues relating to the Middle East peace process; key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement; and the role of Asia in promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine through solidarity and assistance.

78. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was represented by a delegation comprising Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman; Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman of the Committee, who acted as Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur of the meeting; Mr. Slaheddine Abdellah (Tunisia) who also acted as Vice-Chairman; and Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).

79. Presentations were made by 18 experts from Asia and other regions. Each panel was followed by a discussion open to all participants. Representatives of 56 Governments, 5 United Nations bodies and agencies, 1 intergovernmental organization and 22 non-governmental organizations, as well as special guests of the Government of Indonesia, representatives of the media, of universities and institutes attended the Seminar and the Symposium.

80. In a final document adopted at the conclusion of the meeting, the participants at the Seminar emphasized the significance of the role that the countries of Asia and the Pacific had played, and could continue to play, to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. They emphasized that the countries of the region had an important stake in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East. It was suggested that the Palestinian Authority consider formulating a list of specific economic requests that might be presented to Asian Governments to assist the Palestinian people. It was also suggested that a fund be set up by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, similar to the Africa Fund, to assist the Palestinian people. The transfer of technology, vocational training, health and housing were mentioned as important areas in which Asian and Pacific countries could extend meaningful support to the Palestinian people. Non-governmental organizations were called upon to undertake a mobilization campaign of Asian public opinion, based on the principles of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

81. The participating non-governmental organizations elected a new coordinating committee for follow-up action in Asia. The report of the meeting was issued as a publication by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

(c) Seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people

82. A seminar on the theme "Palestinian human development needs" was held at Amman from 20 to 22 May 1997. Its round-table meetings discussed sustainable human development as the basis for nation-building; promotion of poverty eradication and sustainable development; and promotion of gender equality and the full participation of women in society.

83. The Committee expressed sincere appreciation to the Government of Jordan for hosting the Seminar and for the excellent arrangements made. The Seminar participants were honoured to hear an opening address by H.E. Dr. Abdullah Ensour, Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan.

84. The Committee was represented by a delegation comprising Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman; Mr. Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-Chairman; Mr. George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur; Mr. Alounkèo Kittikoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic); and Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).

85. Sixteen experts from various regions, including Palestinians and one Israeli, presented papers. Representatives of 32 Governments, 3 intergovernmental organizations and 11 United Nations bodies and agencies, as well as of 17 non-governmental organizations, participated in the Seminar.

86. The report of the Seminar (A/52/179-E/1997/76) was submitted to the Secretary-General by the Chairman of the Committee, with the request that it be circulated under respective items of the agendas for the regular session of the Economic and Social Council and the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The report was also issued as a publication by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

(d) North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations

87. The North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, with the theme "Thirty years of occupation: looking ahead towards self-determination and Statehood" was held at United Nations Headquarters from 9 to 11 June 1997.

88. Its panel discussions dealt with the key issues of a just and comprehensive settlement; the role of the international community in the transition towards permanent status, and promoting joint action of Palestinian and North American non-governmental organizations in support of the transition to self-determination and statehood. Six workshops were held on related themes to mobilize concrete action by the North American non-governmental organization community.

89. The Committee was represented by its Bureau. Ten panellists presented papers on the different issues and commented on questions and observations. Representatives of 10 Governments, 1 intergovernmental organization and 3 United Nations agencies participated as observers. Representatives of 65 non-governmental organizations, 55 of them accredited to the Committee, participated in the Symposium.

90. Six members of the North American Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations were elected at the final session of the Symposium. The report of the Symposium was issued as a publication by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

(e) United Nations International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations and European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, Geneva, 25-28 August 1997

91. The United Nations International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations and European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, on the theme "Ending thirty years of occupation - the role of non-governmental organizations", was held at Geneva from 25 to 28 August 1997.

92. The Committee was represented by a delegation composed of Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman; Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman; Mr. George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur; Mr. Anatoli M. Zlenko (Ukraine); and Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine).

93. The Meeting was attended by 18 panellists and workshop resource persons, and representatives of 107 non-governmental organizations, 15 of them as observers. It was also attended by 31 Governments, 5 intergovernmental organizations, 12 United Nations bodies and agencies, 5 coordinating committees of non-governmental organizations and a delegation of Palestine.

94. In the Plan of Action adopted at the Meeting, the non-governmental organization participants concluded that campaigns by non-governmental organizations at the national and international levels should be primarily focused on ending the Israeli policy of establishing and expanding settlements, supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including its own State with East Jerusalem as its capital, supporting the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return and/or to compensation, as well as family reunification, and on continuing and intensifying all efforts to assist the Palestinian people in the economic and social fields.

95. The non-governmental organization participants declared, individually and collectively, that they recognized the State of Palestine with borders in conformity with those announced by the Palestine National Council in its Declaration of Independence of 1988. They called upon all non-governmental organizations throughout the world to join them in that solemn declaration and to petition the Governments of their respective nations to recognize the State of Palestine on that basis.

96. At the conclusion of the Meeting, the participants elected the new International Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine and the European Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

97. The report of the joint event, as well as the Plan of Action, will be issued as a publication by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

2. Research, monitoring and publications

98. The Committee continued to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine, and requested the Division to continue its programme of publications, in consultation with the Committee.

99. The Committee noted with appreciation that the Division for Palestinian Rights, in accordance with its mandate, had continued to respond to requests for information and to prepare and disseminate the following publications:

(a) Monthly bulletins covering action by the Committee and other United Nations organs, organizations and agencies, as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others on the question of Palestine, containing the texts of the relevant resolutions, statements and decisions;

(b) Periodic bulletin entitled "Developments related to the Middle East peace process", containing information on the peace process and the multilateral negotiations on the Middle East regional issues;

(c) A monthly chronological summary of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(d) Reports of seminars and non-governmental organization meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(e) A special bulletin on the commemoration, in 1996, of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(f) A compilation of relevant resolutions, decisions and statements adopted in 1996 by the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

100. The Committee noted with appreciation that, in response to its request, the Division had completed a study on the status of Jerusalem that would be published in the near future, and that it would continue its work on a draft study on Israeli settlements.

3. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

101. The Committee noted that the Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical services of the Secretariat, had made substantial progress in the development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), as mandated by the General Assembly at the Committee's request. This included the upgrading of its hardware and software, the inclusion in the system of a comprehensive collection of current United Nations documents and some older documentation, the establishment of a database of non-governmental organizations accredited to the Committee, and other initiatives of the Division in making full use of the electronic facility in its monitoring, research and other activities. The Committee also noted that a public replica of the system had been established and had been made available to external users for the second year, and that the Division was making progress in placing some of its documentation on the Internet.

102. While pleased with these developments, particularly the conversion of some 5,000 pages into electronic format through a vendor from outside the United Nations system, the Committee expressed the wish that, in order to fully implement the mandate originally given by the General Assembly in 1991, further conversion of major relevant documents should take place so as to make the database more comprehensive and useful.

4. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

103. In accordance with the decision of the Committee, two staff members of the Palestinian Authority, one from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the other from the Ministry of the Interior, were invited to participate in a pilot training programme at the Division for Palestinian Rights, from September to December 1996, in conjunction with the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. Owing to unavoidable circumstances, one of the trainees had to leave before completing the programme. The other was extended through January 1997.

104. In the course of their training, the officials familiarized themselves with the various facets of the work of the United Nations and acquired useful insight into the functioning of various United Nations bodies and entities, the Secretariat, as well as the United Nations information activities. The trainees also attended meetings of selected committees and bodies of the United Nations, and conducted research.

105. The Committee considered that the training programme was beneficial and useful for the staff of the Palestinian Authority, in particular its young professionals, and decided to maintain this activity, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations. The Committee was also of the view that the Division for Palestinian Rights provided valuable day-to-day guidance and supervision to the officials of the Palestinian Authority in their training programme at United Nations Headquarters.

5. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

106. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed on 29 November 1996 at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Geneva and at Vienna. On the occasion of the observance, in addition to other activities, an exhibit of Palestinian handicrafts in the occupied territory, entitled "Preserving the Legacy, A New Dawn of Hope", was provided at Headquarters by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations and presented under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day had also been observed in many other cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

107. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar commemorative programme would be organized in connection with the observance of the Day in 1997.

VI. ACTION TAKEN BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 51/25

108. The Department of Public Information continued to provide press coverage, in English and French, of all meetings held at Headquarters and of United Nations bodies dealing with the question of Palestine, including the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Coverage in English and French was also provided to the seminars and symposia held under the auspices of the Committee at Jakarta, Amman and Geneva. Press releases were issued on the text of the statements by the Secretary-General.

109. From September 1996 to August 1997, the Dissemination Unit of the Department responded to a number of information requests and utilized the electronic mail to disseminate material.

110. The Public Inquiries Unit responded to requests for information concerning Middle East issues, including the question of Palestine. The Group Programme Unit organized briefings on the question of Palestine and the Middle East for students and other groups. In addition, the subject was included in the presentation made to visitors taking guided tours, as appropriate.

111. The non-governmental organization sections of the Department continued to disseminate relevant information material, as well as video programmes, to the non-governmental organization community in New York and at Geneva and Vienna.

112. The United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the depositary libraries continued to disseminate material, documents and press releases on the activities on the Committee.

113. The quarterly UN Chronicle has continued its comprehensive coverage of issues related to the question of Palestine, including relevant action taken by the General Assembly and Security Council, as well as special meetings, symposia and seminars. The publications The United Nations and the Question of Palestine and For the Rights of the Palestinians: The Work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People continue to be comprehensive sources of historical information. These publications and the poster entitled "Self-determination: an inalienable right of the Palestinian people" were made available in all languages of the United Nations.

114. The Radio and Central News Service covered extensively all aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in daily news bulletins, weekly current affairs magazines and feature programmes in official and non-official languages for dissemination throughout the world.

115. The Media Division undertook a video taping mission to the Palestinian territories and completed a programme on: (a) Palestinian television with special emphasis on the broadcasters trained by the Department of Public Information; (b) a rehabilitation project of youth centres in Gaza sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme; and (c) training and income-generating programmes for women, sponsored by UNRWA. Videos are being produced for "UN in Action", "CNN World Report" and "1997 Year in Review".

116. As requested by the Committee, video footage on the question of Palestine since 1945 to date has been researched and compiled. Work is under way to establish a small section in the video library devoted to the question of Palestine.

117. The Department, in cooperation with the Government of Greece, organized an international seminar on the theme "The peace process: the challenges ahead", which was held at Athens on 26 and 27 May 1997. The Seminar brought together Palestinian and Israeli media representatives. Participating in the Seminar also were academics and experts on the political and economic development of the Middle East, officials of the Palestinian Authority, and senior journalists representing prominent media organizations from the United States of America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Representatives of Member States and States members of specialized agencies based at Athens participated in the Seminar as observers. The Seminar discussed the status of the peace process and the implementation of peace agreements. Final status negotiations and the economic situation in the region were also discussed.

118. After the Seminar, a fact-finding news mission of eight international journalists visited Cairo and Amman and held meetings with high-ranking officials of the Governments of Egypt and Jordan. It also held meetings with the local press corps.

119. From 15 September to 9 November 1996, the Department organized a training programme at Headquarters for a group of 10 Palestinian media practitioners to strengthen their professional capacity as information media personnel.

120. The Department, in cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights, promoted the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and provided assistance for the special exhibit mounted in the public lobby of the General Assembly building, entitled, "Preserving the Legacy, A New Dawn of Hope".

121. The global network of United Nations information centres and services actively promoted the central issues relating to the question of Palestine, organizing media activities and special events, producing newsletters and regularly disseminating relevant information materials made available from Headquarters. In many cases, the material disseminated was translated into local languages.

122. The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People presented special opportunities for cooperating with local non-governmental organizations in organizing joint events and programmes to draw attention to the issue of Palestinian rights. Both print and electronic media coverage of this event in most of these countries were extensive. Panel discussions and forums were among several activities organized by the United Nations information centres at Harare and Prague. The centre at Harare organized a forum on the theme "Searching for peace", in cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Social Welfare, the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and a panel of Zimbabwean academics. With the support of the Czech-Arabic Friendship Society, the centre at Prague organized a panel discussion focusing on the economic issues involved in the Middle East peace process, the impact of border closures and the activities of the United Nations system. The United Nations information centre at Pretoria, in cooperation with the African National Congress and the Government of South Africa, honoured the observance of the Day. Other activities included an exhibition of paintings dedicated to the peace process, organized by the information centre at Rabat, and the dedication of the weekly television programme of the information centre at Ouagadougou to the question of Palestine. Film screenings were arranged by the information centre at Tokyo, which produced a Japanese-language version of the United Nations video "Palestine: 1890s-1990s", and the centre at Brazzaville, which organized a special screening of the film "Oui, les

Palestiniens ont des droits", for teachers in the Department of History at the Lycée Chaminade.

123. Three United Nations meetings dealing with the question of Palestine received special attention from select United Nations information centres. The information centre at Cairo and the information service at Amman provided press coverage and logistical support for the United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian People on the theme "Palestinian human development needs", which was held at Amman. The centre at Cairo also provided logistical and information support for visiting members of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The information centre at Athens played a key role in the organization of a Department of Public Information seminar for journalists on the question of Palestine on the theme "The peace process: challenges ahead", which was held at Athens. The information centre at Jakarta provided organizational support to the Division for Palestinian Rights and mounted an exhibit for the United Nations Asian seminar and Non-Governmental Organization Symposium on the Question of Palestine held at Jakarta, while the information service at Bangkok provided press coverage.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

124. The year 1997 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories, by Israel. The year also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), in which the Assembly decided on the partitioning of Palestine and called for the establishment of independent Jewish and Arab States and a special international regime for Jerusalem. It was also 10 years since the beginning of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising which helped create the conditions for the peace process. Mindful of these milestones in the history of dispossession and suffering of the Palestinian people, the Committee urges the international community to redouble its efforts in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the key to a just and lasting peace.

125. The signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993 by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization created a dramatic turning point in the search for peace in the Middle East, leading to the emergence of a new reality on the ground, enabling the Palestinian people to take its first steps towards independence and opening new possibilities for cooperation among the peoples of the region. The Committee considers it essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached and for the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis.

126. The Committee expresses its greatest concern and anguish that the hopes ushered in by initial positive developments were not carried through in the year under review and that the peace process itself appeared increasingly in jeopardy, leading to an alarming exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground, resulting in loss of life on both sides. The Committee believes that the harsh economic measures taken against the occupied Palestinian territory, including the prolonged blockade, are a form of collective punishment in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the agreements reached, and calls for their end in the interests of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace.

127. Especially worrisome were actions taken by Israel to strengthen its control over occupied East Jerusalem, such as the opening of a new entrance to the tunnel near Al Aqsa Mosque, the withdrawal of Jerusalem identity cards, the destruction of buildings, and the intensified efforts to establish Jewish settlements in the old city. The resumption of construction and expansion of settlements throughout the occupied territory, including Jerusalem, and statements made by the Government in that regard caused increasing fears for future prospects of achieving a just peace and the Palestinian right to self-determination.

128. The Committee deplores the decision by the Government of Israel to approve the construction of a new Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem, and its decision to begin and proceed with construction in spite of the unanimous expression of opposition by the international community. The Committee fully supports the recommendations made by the General Assembly in resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, in particular for the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and to ensure its respect, in accordance with common

article 1. The Committee will continue to remain engaged in the follow-up to the recommendations of the Assembly and to promote the necessary action.

129. The Committee calls for the reinjection of momentum into the stalled Middle East peace process and for the implementation of the agreements reached between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. In this regard, it notes with appreciation the increased involvement in efforts to bring about the resumption of the bilateral negotiations by the co-sponsors of the peace process, as well as the European Union. The Committee is also appreciative of the resilient efforts with which a number of world leaders contributed to the task of restarting the peace process.

130. The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance, is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts. As the organ of the General Assembly established to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee believes that its role continues to be useful and necessary during the transitional period and until a satisfactory final settlement is achieved.

131. The Committee reaffirms that such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, the principle of exchange of land for peace and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. The Committee also insists that, during the interim period, Israel must recognize and respect its obligations as the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

132. While remaining firm on these positions of principle, the Committee has continued to make adjustments in its approach and programme of work, taking into account the new realities, in order to make a concrete contribution to promoting the implementation of the agreements reached and to mobilize international assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

133. The Committee wishes to express its great appreciation to those States that have supported its work and facilitated the organization of events held under the Committee's auspices. The Committee believes that, in the light of the new situation and the constructive position of the Committee, as reflected in its programme of work, the time has come for all States to recognize the valuable contribution that it can make as a forum for dialogue, analysis, exchange of expertise, mobilization of public opinion and action in support of the peace efforts and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as well as its socio-economic development. The Committee considers that a broadening of its membership to include countries that support its objectives but have not hitherto participated in its work, would greatly enhance the contribution of the General Assembly to promoting peace at this important stage.

134. The Committee considers that its programme of seminars in the various regions has played a useful role in informing and mobilizing public opinion, promoting the exchange of experience and expertise among participants from the various regions and Palestinians and Israelis, and in promoting increased

involvement by Governments in the search for a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict. The annual convening of a seminar devoted specifically to issues related to the economic and social challenges facing the Palestinian people during the transitional period has proved very useful and the Committee intends to continue this practice in order to give the international donor community, including United Nations bodies and agencies, the opportunity to exchange views with representatives of the Palestinian Authority and internationally renowned experts on relevant issues.

135. In view of the current serious situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, the Committee intends to encourage renewed, intensified efforts by non-governmental organizations to organize and coordinate sustained campaigns in order to inform public opinion and to promote national and international action in support of United Nations resolutions and the Committee's objectives. It plans to continue its programme of meetings of non-governmental organizations in the various regions with a view to providing the non-governmental organization constituency with a periodic analysis of political developments, a forum for an exchange of views and experience, as well as for planning and coordinating specific activities of non-governmental organizations.

136. The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine. The Committee requests the Division to continue its programme of publications, in consultation with the Committee, and to pay particular attention to finalizing the proposed study on settlements during the coming year. The Committee notes with appreciation the further progress made by the Division in developing the United Nations computer-based Information System on the Question of Palestine and calls for continuing efforts to include all relevant documentation in the system.

137. Noting further the successful continuation in the Division of the project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority in the workings of the United Nations system, the Committee requests the Division to continue this exercise in the future.

138. The Committee will continue, especially during the transitional period and until a fair, satisfactory solution is achieved, to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its work programme in the light of developments in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Notes

[1] Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/1 of 22 September 1992, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not participate in the work of the Committee.

[2] Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/31/35).

[3] Ibid., Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/32/35); ibid., Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/33/35); ibid., Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/35/35); ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/36/35); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/38/35); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/39/35); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/40/35); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/41/35); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/42/35); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/43/35); ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/44/35); ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/45/35); ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/46/35); ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/47/35); ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/48/35); ibid., Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/49/35); ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/50/35); and ibid., Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35 (A/51/35).

[4] A/48/486-S/26560, annex; see Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-eighth Year, Supplement for October, November and December 1993, document S/26560.

[5] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Palestine, represented by the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, was also an observer.

[6] The membership of the Working Group was as follows: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Guinea, Guyana, India, Malta, Pakistan, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Palestine, represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization as the representative of the people directly concerned.

[7] A/AC.183/1996/CRP.1.

[8] See press release GA/PAL/739.

[9] See press release GA/PAL/742.

[10] United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 75, No. 973.

[11] See press release GA/PAL/766.

[12] See S/PV.3745.

[13] S/1997/199.

[14] S/1997/235.

[15] S/1997/241.

[16] A/AC.183/SR.230.

[17] See A/AC.183/SR.229 and A/AC.183/SR.231.

[18] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 3 (E/1997/23-E/CN.14/1997/150), chap. II, sect. A.

[19] S/1997/623.

[20] See press releases HR/CERD/97/53 and HR/CERD/97/60.

[21] See press release HR/SC/97/31.